

# ALICE SPRINGS, MT. ISA, LONGREACH, NHULUNBUY TO GET EXTRA TV SERVICE

The ABA has approved an additional commercial television service for Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory and Mt Isa and Longreach in Queensland.

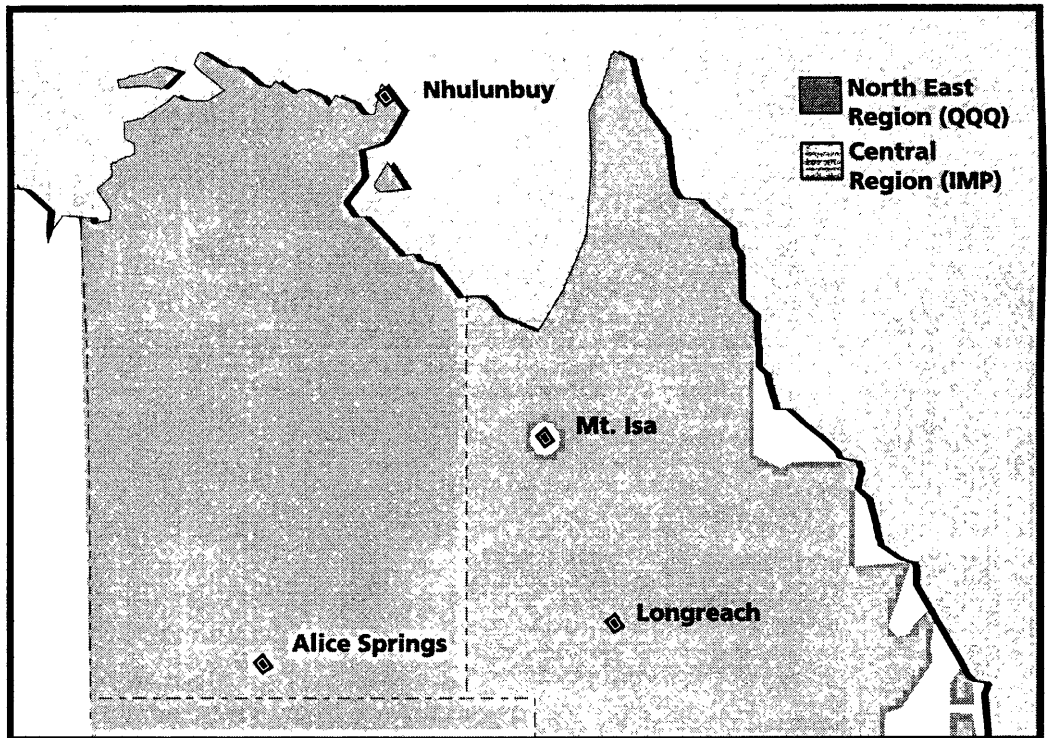
The ABA approval follows an investigation into applications from Imparja Television, Ten Queensland and the Councils of Nhulunbuy and Longreach. The applications sought ABA permission to re-broadcast the Imparja and QQQ services to communities where they are not currently received.

'In this decision, the ABA has opened the way for additional television services in some of the most remote communities of Australia, communities which at present have access to relatively few broadcasting services,' said ABA Chairman Mr Brian Johns.

'These services have been approved under temporary arrangements which allow re-broadcasting of existing commercial services.'

In making its decision, the ABA took into account the special characteristics of the applications. The ABA has undertaken wide public consultation in the remote areas in its planning process and again through this investigation. This included directly seeking the views of anyone who had previously expressed interest in providing new services in these areas. As a result of these processes, the ABA was not convinced that allocation of additional, independent licences in the areas would result in a better outcome for viewers in the foreseeable future.

Other special factors were that the existing remote commercial television services are not commercially viable independent of government subsidies, and that the Imparja and QQQ licensees both supported



each other's applications.

As part of its present broadcast planning processes, the ABA is examining possible longer term solutions to the lack of services in remote Australia.

The ABA's early preference is for some form of extension of these remote licence areas to permit other communities to re-transmit. It is disinclined to plan one or more additional independent services on the grounds that further competition in such subsidised markets is unlikely to promote the objects of the Broadcasting Services Act.

These and other planning issues will be canvassed in draft ABA licence area plans and discussion papers to be released later this year for public comment.

## PLANNING

The ABA has responsibility for the planning and management of the broadcasting parts of the AM and FM radio bands

and the VHF and UHF television bands.

The ABA has embarked on a national planning process for the broadcasting services bands with the objective of optimising their use by broadcasters and other users, for example, commercial television, community radio and low power information services.

This process will allow the ABA to improve reception of existing national (ABC and SBS), commercial and community services and ensure that as far as possible there is room for new services where they are needed.

Planning decisions must balance a number of complex public interest considerations including demand and technical limitations. Thus, the ABA is bound to conduct the planning process in an open and accountable way which it is doing by consulting widely. Planning will progress systematically over the next two to three years across the entire

country according to planning priorities established in September 1993.

## RE-TRANSMISSION

Re-transmission of existing services is addressed by the Broadcasting Services Act under section 212, which exempts a service provider from the regulatory regime of the Act and gives protection against legal action for services that do no more than re-transmit programs that are transmitted by a commercial broadcaster.

If a re-transmission of programs occur inside the relevant licence area, no permission from the ABA is needed. However, ABA permission is required for re-transmission outside the originating licensee's area. The provision is not intended to stand in place of the planning and allocation of permanent licences. Thus the ABA must consider such requests on their individual merits in light of its obligation to balance competing interests. □